Interview with Lane Holdcroft

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LANE HOLDCROFT

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Early years, education, and military service

Q: Would you like to give me a little biographical data of where you were born, your education, children, marriage?

HOLDCROFT: I was born and raised on a farm in northwestern Iowa. I attended Iowa State University where I earned my undergraduate degree. I earned my graduate degree at Michigan State University. My undergraduate work was in the agricultural production sciences. My graduate work was in agricultural economics with a focus on agricultural and economic development in developing countries. I became interested in the foreign service after living in Japan for part of a year with Japanese farmers under the aegis of the International Farm Youth Exchange Program.

Q: What year was this?

HOLDCROFT: This was in 1955 from early June until December.

Q: What led you to join this program?

HOLDCROFT: This was a program implemented by the National 4-H Club Foundation, and supported by a variety of major U.S. corporations and the State Department. Its purpose was to encourage cultural exchanges between American and overseas young farm people whose families and themselves were involved in rural youth activities such as 4-H Club work. After having that experience in Japan, I became very interested in working overseas. I went back to work for Iowa State University for some four months and then, when I about to be drafted, I enlisted in the U.S. Army for the counter-intelligence specialty. After basic training in Arkansas and the Army Intelligence School training in Baltimore, I applied for language study and had the opportunity to study Korean at the Army Language School at the Presidio of Monterey in California. Eventually, in Korea after promotion to sergeant, I was commissioned a 2nd lieutenant in Korea in Military Intelligence. With my language capacity, first in Japanese, then in Korean, I became interested particularly in working in Japan or Korea, and doing something that would make use of my agricultural training and experience. In 1959, the Near East Foundation had a new USOM/K contract to help South Korea's government launch a national rural community development program. Shortly after I was discharged from the Army in April 1959, I was hired as one of several advisors on that contract. That was the beginning of my association with what soon became known as the U.S. Agency for International Development. At the time that I went on that contract to Korea, USAID had not yet come into being. The Korea foreign assistance mission was called the United States Operations Mission to Korea or USOM/K.

Q: This was part of the old International Corporation Administration?

HOLDCROFT: Right. The ICA commenced operations as our U.S. foreign assistance program in 1955. And it was in 1961 that our foreign assistance agency became the USAID, United States Agency for International Development.

Q: You were single at this time?

HOLDCROFT: No. When I was in the Army I met a young lady who was managing the Army Service Club in Yokohama, Japan. I was in Japan on R&R from Korea. She was transferred to Korea shortly after we met. A year or two later we were married in Seattle, her hometown. That was in April 1959, just prior to going back to Korea on the USOM/K contract. Our four children, three sons and a daughter, were born in Korea between October 1960 and March 1966. Virginia and I were married 26 years - until she died of cancer in 1985. Later I married her best friend, who had been matron-of-honor at my first wedding. Janet and I have been married nearly nine years. Getting back to my time with the U.S. foreign assistance program in Korea, it was professionally a very exciting period.

Work in Korea in rural development - 1960

Q: You were first working with an AID contractor in Korea?

HOLDCROFT: Yes, the Near East Foundation had the USOM/K contract to help the Republic of Korea's Government launch a national rural development program. I was assigned to Taejon, capitol of Chung chong Namdo, located about 100 miles south of Seoul. At the age 26, I became Advisor to the National Community Development Program in four provinces.

Third World rural community development programs have been the focus of a number of analytical studies that have looked at the impact of a multi-sector development approach versus a single sector development approach at the village level. In the 1950s and early 1960s, rural community development was seen as a way of providing technical assistance to improve the levels of living of rural people, and also of developing democratic institutions at the grass roots level.

Over time the community development approach lost host-country political, and external donor, support in most developing countries. By 1965, there were only a small number of community development programs in existence around the world that were being directly

supported by national governments and donor organizations. But during the '50s and early '60s, this was a very popular donor-supported movement directed at responding to the spread of totalitarianism, a euphemism for the spread of communism in the rural areas of the developing world.

The lessons learned are many and later in my career I authored a small book about the rise and fall of the community development approach to rural development. I found in my research that the approach worked very well where there was a charismatic national leader who was willing to provide the political and other resources needed to keep it moving forward and expanding. But where there was not a charismatic leader who could provide the kind of environment that encouraged multi-sectoral efforts, community development movements failed.

Q: You may want to include that publication, if you like, as an appendix to this oral history if it's still available.

HOLDCROFT: That early rural community development movement is important in the sense that about every decade, as donor agencies and Third World nations look for ways of getting at basic development problems, they often return to the rural community development approach as a model of some kind for a new rural development effort. There is a tendency to try to reinvent the wheel. For example, you remember the attention and impetus that was given to “integrated rural development”, or IRD, in the 1970s and the beginning of the '80s - that effort was modeled on the earlier rural community development movement.

Q: That's very interesting. Were there host-government counterparts?

HOLDCROFT: The way it was organized in every country was quite similar. There would be a national ministry or sub-ministry-level agency that would be attached to the prime minister's or president's office. That agency would have a national training facility, and staff at the national, provincial, and district level that would provide the administrative and

technical back-stopping for village-level workers to organize villagers to cooperatively undertake projects that would benefit their communities.

Q: You felt that national level input was one of the keys leading to success?

HOLDCROFT: The record was mixed. But generally those national efforts that had the support of the president or the prime minister, for example Nehru in India and Magsaysay in the Philippines, became major development efforts in those nations. Wherever there was that kind of political support, these movements did well. But in most nations the community development programs were competing with the old-line ministries - agriculture, health, and education - and over time in many instances significant animosities arose. And this carried over to some degree into the donor agency's operations. For example, there was a great deal of bureaucratic animosity between some of the U.S. advisors in the community development division and those in the agricultural division of the USOM in Korea. This did not cause any serious problems at the field level. But there was a good deal of competition for budgetary and personnel resources between those divisions in the mission. Being a contractor in the field, I was not privy to what was going on in that regard at that time, but there have been papers written about this - the controversy surrounding the community development divisions in USAID missions around the world.

Q: Versus the agriculture...

HOLDCROFT: Agriculture, health and education - because most of the community development program that USAID supported had health, education and agriculture elements. And so there was the sense that this multi-sectoral initiative wasn't appropriately utilizing the skills of host country personnel in the technical ministries. In Korea, the community development program was identified with Syngman Rhee and then briefly with Chang Myon. When the coup d'#tat took place and Park Chung Hee assumed power as chief of state, the national community development entity was abolished. Most of its

programs were subsumed by the Ministry of Agriculture, with some by the Ministry of Health, and the Ministry of Education.

Q: About what time would this have occurred?

HOLDCROFT: After the student uprisings, President Syngman Rhee resigned in April 1960. Then in July, Chang Myon was elected Prime Minister under the new parliamentary cabinet system. The next year in May, some of the military revolted and Park Chung Hee assumed power as Chairman of the Supreme Council for National Reconstruction. Then in late 1963, Park Chung Hee was elected President under the new Constitution that revived the presidential system.

Q: And by that time you had become...

HOLDCROFT: By that time I had become a direct hire foreign service officer. I continued to serve in Taejon, but, after the coup, as the USAID provincial Rural Development Officer. I was advisor to the governors of two provinces until mid-1965. Then I was transferred to the USAID/K headquarters in Seoul and put in charge of an expanded Provincial Rural Development Staff. We had at that time two American advisors in each of the provinces.

It was a rather exciting period because this was the time when all of the earlier development efforts started to come to fruition. The Korean economy, both rural and urban, started to take off. From 1962 through 1976, the Republic of Korea maintained an average annual economic growth rate of about 10 percent. Exports went up very rapidly - from only $50 million in 1962 to nearly $8 billion in 1976. Of course, per capita income also grew very substantially. Agricultural yields increased very dramatically. All of this commenced in the early '60s. The only significant external donor at that time was the United States. We made a very substantial contribution to that effort.

I remained in Korea until 1968. From mid-1968 until mid-1969, I was on the Korea desk in USAID's Washington DC headquarters. My office was in the State Department on the fourth floor above the diplomatic entrance.

Q: You started as a contractor in Korea in 1959?

HOLDCROFT: Yes, and in 1963 I became a direct hire foreign service officer.

Q: And stayed on five years in Korea as a direct hire?

HOLDCROFT: Yes, I stayed on five years as a direct hire rural development officer. I was the American direct hire officer in the USAID Mission who had served in Korea the longest, and had tested fluency in the Korean language. So I had the opportunity to become involved in interesting activities beyond my responsibilities for the rural development field operations. For example, I had the opportunity to do the Korean interpreting for many of the American VIP's that visited Korea.

Q: How did you find your Korean counterparts as far as capabilities and willingness to work with you?

HOLDCROFT: They were super; for the most part well trained and highly motivated. At all levels they worked hard and played hard. Their culture stressed a strong work ethic. I could work without an interpreter, so it was easier to form close working and personal relationships with my Korean colleagues. I spent over eleven years in Korea. I went there in the Army in 1957 and I left USAID/Korea in 1968.

Q: You could be called a Korean hand.

HOLDCROFT: I could be called a young, “old Korean hand” at that time. Those were really exciting days to be associated with the U.S. foreign assistance program in Korea, as it was

working so well in terms of helping the Koreans succeed in formulating and implementing their ambitious Five Year Economic Development Plans.

I am always quite surprised to hear comments by supposedly knowledgeable people that downplay the significance and importance of America's role in Korea's unusually successful economic development effort. For example, I happened to hear a Mr. Keyes, Republican candidate for president, on the PBS McNeil-Lehrer News Hour a few months ago. When asked about the significance of America's role in Korea's economic development - he stated something to the effect that Americans didn't really do anything much in Korea in terms of foreign aid after 1960!

Not true. In fact, it was during the '60s that our program was so large in terms of personnel - direct hire and contract, technical and administrative - that were working in Korea on behalf of the Korean development effort. We had absolutely outstanding people, some more controversial than others, who provided leadership to the U.S. aid effort in those days. When I arrived, there were a number of Americans in agriculture and industry who had outstanding careers in the States but who felt called to work in Korea. Korea was of importance to the U.S. and free world in the minds of so many Americans with so many personal ties forged during the Korean War.

Semi-retired deans of American universities were coming out on long-term assignments. The outstanding director of the research system of the state of Texas was, for some time, our agricultural research advisor to the Ministry of Agriculture. And a chap who operated a fertilizer producing factory in America was operating the major fertilizer factory in Korea, as advisor to the Korean who was managing that facility. We had some of the outstanding fisheries people from the Pacific Northwest assisting the Koreans in developing their fishing fleets - much to the chagrin of the American fisheries people today.

Q: There wasn't any shortage of American skills who were willing to come forward.

HOLDCROFT: That's right. It was a unique opportunity for young persons like me to work with world class professionals. Those were heady times. One of the outstanding mission directors was Joel Bernstein. Joel was a bright economist, who had earned a Ph.D. at the University of Chicago at a very young age. He and our small economics staff provided a great deal of the intellectual leadership to the Koreans in terms of their macroeconomic planning, their national programs and policies. Joel and his deputy, Roger Ernst, also provided excellent leadership to the several hundred Americans and Koreans, contract and direct hire, were in the USAID/K Mission at that time.

Q: As I recall it was one of the largest, if not the largest...

HOLDCROFT: It was probably the largest USAID mission in the world at that time. Iran had been - as I recall - the largest mission in the '50s and I believe Korea was the largest in the '60s.

Q: Was that your favorite post of your overseas experience?

HOLDCROFT: It was certainly the one that influenced me the most in terms of my own thinking and understanding of development and the role of the external donor. I also thoroughly enjoyed my other overseas posts which were Ethiopia, where I served for four years and the Philippines, where I also served for four years. There were tours in Washington DC after each of my overseas assignments. Ethiopia was particularly interesting because much of Ethiopia was still as it had been a century or more ago.

Director of the Rural Development Office in USAID/Ethiopia - 1969

Q: Is that where you served after Korea?

HOLDCROFT: After serving in Korea and a year on the Korean desk in USAID/ Washington, I was assigned to Ethiopia. I went out as the deputy head of Rural Development Office in the USAID Mission. A short time later, the office head departed as a

result of health problems, so I headed up that office for nearly four years. Ethiopia in a real sense - its development atmosphere - was like Korea turned upside down. For example, Korea had a very low percentage of illiteracy; Ethiopia had a very high percentage of illiterate people. Ethiopia has a large land base; Korea's was very small. And on it went.

We arrived in Ethiopia mid-1969. That was an promising era in Ethiopia's development. At that time, a critical mass of U.S., Canadian, and European-schooled Ethiopians, who had a clear vision of what needed to be done in their particular field of endeavor, were back in Ethiopia. They were ready to help improve the well-being of their less fortunate fellow citizens. This cadre of well-trained young people, most in their early '30s with lots of vim and vinegar, were greatly benefitted by the donor programs that provided them with resources to move ahead in their specialties. We in the donor community were very much a part of their effort to further economic and social change in that very undeveloped nation, one of the poorest in the world.

Unfortunately the political system was still quite antiquated and the policies were in many instances not very supportive of the development efforts of these young well-trained people. For example, Ethiopia still in the 1960s had a somewhat feudalistic system of land tenure. Producers were not provided with the incentive they needed in order to make investments in improving the productive capacity of the lands that they farmed. And so their agriculture tended to be more exploitative. Still, much progress was being made while we were there, particularly in terms of training in health and education and agriculture. The levels of living of the various peoples in Ethiopia were commencing to improve. The malaria program, for example, was quite successful in reducing the incidence of malaria in the lowlands. Unfortunately, the Ethiopian political advisors who were closest to Haile Selassie were of an earlier generation. They did not understand the need to undertake some significant reforms in land tenure, economic reforms that would give more opportunities to the poor majority, reforms that would commence to spread the wealth among the population.

Q: There were large holdings by...

HOLDCROFT: Very large holdings were owned by many of the members of the royal family, the Coptic church, and senior military officers and government officials. They were given grants of land. They often did not use this land - they did not farm the land themselves; they simply used the tenants who may have already farmed the land. They had middlemen who would collect the rents from the tenants. A lot of change for the better was being effected, but it wasn't keeping pace with the expectations of the growing urban population, particularly the poor. And thus it was that eventually Haile Selassie was deposed. In fact, less than a year after I had departed Ethiopia, Haile Selassie was deposed and a totalitarian communist-oriented state emerged. I have very fond memories of Ethiopia and of those young Ethiopians who had been trained in Europe, the United States and Canada. The dedication that they had to improving the well-being of their fellow citizens... Most of these young educated leaders - during the ensuing regime - were either killed or left the country. Large numbers sought political asylum abroad, and went to work for various bilateral and multilateral aid agencies. Those of my Ethiopian colleagues that were not imprisoned or killed wound up in UN organizations, at the African Development Bank, the Asian Development Bank, the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund. Ethiopia went through some hellishly difficult times as a society and a people after Mengistu assumed control of the government.

Q: Prior to the coup did AID have a relatively large program there?

HOLDCROFT: Yes, it was a very significant program. The geopolitical reason for the large program was the fact that in this era before communications satellites were in place, the US military maintained a communications facility in Eritrea called Kagnew Station. American economic and technical assistance was to some degree a quid pro quo for having that large, very substantial facility, in Ethiopia. After the satellites were in place,

there was no longer the need for the communications facility. Part of its mission, as I recall, was to eavesdrop on radio communications from Russian and the Middle East.

Q: Then this was related to the Cold War, at least to some extent.

HOLDCROFT: Although I don't recall it being discussed, I understood that the level of aid for Ethiopia was a result of our having a military facility in the country. We were very proud of the institutions that we helped build, starting from scratch, such as the national university in Addis Ababa and the college of agriculture at Alemaya near Harar where the Oklahoma State University provided technical assistance for almost two decades. These institutions - during the Mengistu years - underwent some very difficult times, although they have reopened and are in operation at this time.

Return to USAID/Washington and working in agriculture and rural development in Southeast Asia and Jordan - 1973

After Ethiopia, I went back to Washington and headed up the Agriculture and Rural Development Division in the Supporting Assistance Bureau, which was the bureau responsible for overseas programs in Southeast Asia and Jordan. That was an interesting time because we were very much involved in making decisions that would impinge upon USAID's largest program, Vietnam, as well as programs in Laos and Cambodia. I had the opportunity during that period to visit those countries and to gain some understanding of the difficulties of undertaking economic and technical assistance programs in politically unstable areas that were close to being or had become war zones. I have a great deal of admiration for those of my colleagues who served in those posts during those difficult years in the '70s.

I was in Korea and on my way to Vietnam the very day that the Embassy closed in Saigon. I arrived in Hong Kong to catch a PanAm flight to Saigon the day the Embassy was evacuated. I had earlier had the opportunity to serve on the joint State-Aid task force that was sent to the Pentagon to work with the DOD on a program to ascertain the amount of

economic and military support Vietnam would need to sustain its operations during the summer and fall of 1975. That was an curious exercise because we - Stu Callison and Hadley Smith, and several other military officers - would disappear into the bowels of the Pentagon every day and study the potential impact of several truncated versions of a South Vietnam. We tried to ascertain what resources were needed to sustain the various scenarios.

Q: Those must have been fascinating times.

HOLDCROFT: Those were curious times. I recall the task force involved long days most of February and March. After that I went out to Asia and nearly arrived in Vietnam at the very end of our presence there. The day after Saigon fell, I went on to Manila from Hong Kong. I ran into a few of my former colleagues who had just arrived from Saigon. They had all had harrowing evacuation experiences. I saw our Ambassador from Saigon, Graham Martin, dining alone at Sea Front the day after I arrived in Manila. I had met him briefly on an earlier visit to Saigon, and had read many of his recent Vietnam situation and outlook cables.

Q: This was 1975?

HOLDCROFT: Yes.

Q: You could have been on the last helicopter.

A year's sabbatical at Michigan State University - 1975

HOLDCROFT: Commencing in September 1975, I spent a year at Michigan State. That was just prior to going out to the Philippines in September of 1976, which, Charles, is where we first met you and Liz.

Q: This was the AID-sponsored long term training?

HOLDCROFT: That's right. I had a year of long-term graduate school training in agricultural economics. I had a very heavy schedule because I was doing research on rural development and lecturing, as well as taking a full class load. Carl Eicher was my very capable major advisor. Carl and the other faculty were very encouraging and helpful. I was given an appointment as a visiting scholar. It was an intellectually stimulating, but very demanding year. My understanding of development was greatly enhanced. I didn't do much with my family that year. Fortunately, my wife was very supportive.

The day after my orals, our family departed Michigan for the Philippines. There I met you at a very difficult time for the USAID/Philippines Mission because our good friend and colleague, Garnett Zimmerly, the Mission Director, had just died in a plane crash. The tragedy occurred about a week before we arrived. You would remember that better than I do.

Chief of agriculture and rural development USAID/Philippines - 1976

Q: This was September of 1976.

HOLDCROFT: Yes. You were there and I remember you said that the reception that you hosted the evening we arrived was the first time that the USAID staff had had a social function since his death.

Q: It was a farewell for your predecessor and a welcome for...

HOLDCROFT: The evening of the day that we arrived. It was at the Sea Front dining room. It seems like only yesterday, doesn't it?

Q: Yes, yes.

HOLDCROFT: At any rate, my time in the Philippines was really kind of fun too, although as you'll recall it had its ups and downs. But the dynamic leadership that the Philippine

agricultural sector being provided by the Minister of Agriculture was something to behold. The way that various public and private resources were mobilized in this push for rice and food self-sufficiency was most impressive.

Q: How were your working relationships with your counterparts?

HOLDCROFT: They were really super. I had good personal and professional relations with all of my colleagues in the Philippines. It was rather expected for a number of reasons. I had had the good fortune of having been in and out of the Philippines on short-term visits since the '50s. So I knew something about the people and the country. I had known a number of the Filipino agricultural leaders for some years. Also I had worked in 1975 on the strategy that the USAID Mission was employing for its agriculture and rural development efforts. Therefore, I was well prepared to head up the USAID Agricultural Development Office in the Philippines.

Q: Did you find them competent?

HOLDCROFT: Very competent. Mostly they were trained at U.S. graduate schools. They were very well prepared, but unfortunately caught in a situation where they had to walk the line between doing what was expected of them by their President and a political system that wanted to maintain the status quo. They knew what needed to be done in order to move forward their programs directed to helping the poor people - the poor farmers, the poor urban dwellers. But change would usually be at some cost to those few hundred families that controlled the political economy. So reform was a slow process.

Q: Was this politics versus economic development? Was that the way you saw it?

HOLDCROFT: Yes, in most regards that is correct. The “patron” mentality and the application of the “patron” system to political organizations inhibited change that addressed the real problems of the poor and otherwise disadvantaged. The “patron” system is the old social system the Spaniards brought to their colonies around the world. It

involves unquestioning loyalty to the big man, the hacienda owner, or the political leader. Then the “patron” is required to look after the welfare of his followers.

Q: Did the program suffer in the late Marcos years due to the known shortcomings of that administration?

HOLDCROFT: Yes. Increasingly those programs that were directed at improving levels of living of the poorer segments of Philippine society were less effective. For example, in terms of reaching its stated objectives, the land reform program was increasingly watered down. The bottom line was that the rich were getting richer and the poor were getting poorer. Studies that we helped finance by the University of the Philippines/Diliman indicated that the distribution of income nationwide was becoming more skewed.

Fortunately, since that time the situation has improved immensely. And although now I'm not following the Philippines closely, my sense is that the economy is probably doing better now than it has in any number of years. Perhaps as well or better than it has done since the early years of Marcos.

Q: The technocrats, I gather, were making considerable progress in the early Marcos years.

HOLDCROFT: That's right. There were a lot of institutional and technological innovations that could and did quickly impact favorably on the economy in the early Marcos years.

Q: Do you remember any of your most prominent success stories or failures there?

HOLDCROFT: It started before I arrived and continued on after I departed, but the most successful efforts that we were involved in were those that were associated with the rice and food self-sufficiency programs. We played a very key role in linking the expertise being trained and technology being produced at the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) to the Filipino farmer. We were the catalysts that made it possible for IRRI's world-

renown resources to be made available very quickly to Philippine agriculture. That's particularly noteworthy with rice, but the same applies to other crops as we made available the work of other international research centers. The newest technology in maize and wheat came from CIMMYT in Mexico, and in horticultural crops from the Asian Vegetable Research Center on Taiwan. At any rate, agricultural technology development and transfer was a very successful program and we were the major - and usually the only donor - supporting those kind of activities. Of course, our support to the educational and research institutions, the numerous colleges of agriculture and Philippine Agricultural Research Council, also had very high returns. Incidentally, the Philippines Agricultural Research Council has become a model for countries around the world to use in setting up institutions to develop effective and efficient national agricultural research efforts.

Q: How was it that the University of Kansas or Kansas State that had a large project out there? Did it ever succeed?

HOLDCROFT: You know that that program was still going on when I left. Certainly it was successful in terms of the part of it that was supporting Central Luzon State University and its college of agriculture. I don't have good handles on what the marketing component contributed to the growth of the Philippine agricultural sector. Certainly the educational part of it was very effective. The mechanisms for developing packages of technology that small farmers could easily use to increase their output in some areas - even while I was there - was successful. But I don't know what happened after 1980.

Q: Did you experience the clash between provincial development and agriculture, as you were exposed to with community development in Korea?

HOLDCROFT: No. It's interesting that we had a close working relationship among the Bicol Program, the Provincial Development Office, and the Agricultural Development Offices. We cooperated very closely. I don't remember even one controversy. I think it's

in part a function of the cordial relationships of the office heads, namely Don Wadley, Bill Sommers and myself. We never had any problems.

I do remember a kind of turf problem between my office and Capital Development Office, headed by Dick Dangler, with regard to which office should have the small scale irrigation project. It came to my office from the Capital Development Office and he wanted it back. The issue was whether or not that it should be in the Agricultural Development Office with its agricultural technical staff or in the Capital Development Office with its civil engineering staff. I didn't feel strongly about it, but the U.S. contract staff on the project maintained that they would get better support if it stayed in our office. My recollection now is that it went back to the Capital Development Office about the time that I departed Manila. These kinds of issues were minimal... Generally, the Philippines was a neat place to work. Q: The climate there was both a hindrance and conducive to agricultural development, I suppose.

HOLDCROFT: Yes, it's a tough place, agriculturally speaking, because the land resource has been much abused. In 1955, something like 90 percent of the country was covered in forest and now it's less than five percent. There has been so much erosion and leaching, and so many associated problems that the productive capacity of those tropical soils is greatly reduced. Pest and disease problems are extreme because of the climate and people pressure on the land. On the positive side, crops can be raised the year around. Three crops of rice per annum is common.

Q: You left the Philippines in 1980?

New assignment as chief of the Technical Resources Office of the USAID/Africa Bureau - 1980

HOLDCROFT: 1980. That's right. I was assigned to the Africa Bureau in USAID's Washington DC headquarters. I headed up the Africa Bureau's Agricultural and Rural Development Division for two years, and then the Bureau's newly established Technical Resources Office for two years. Q: When you first got back there you used as one of your

consultants Dr. Vernon Johnson. Is that correct? He just did a long interview with Haven North on his experience with AID agriculture. HOLDCROFT: Yes, I had know Vern for a number of years. He really knew African agriculture, and we thought it was important that he continue to work on African agricultural issues. There were other very experienced people like Vern that consulted with us at that time. We needed all the expertise that was available as we were formulating a strategy and program to respond to the deteriorating food situation in Sub-Saharan Africa. Some others that come to mind are Ryland Holmes, Rex Daly, Ev Headrick, Wendell McMillan, Boyd Whittle, Fran La Beau and Ed Hogan.

Q: So you were with the agricultural division of the Africa bureau...

HOLDCROFT: For two years and then the new Technical Resources Office. What had been the Development Resources Office was divided roughly into two units: the Technical Resources Office and the Project Development Office. Over those four years, I worked closely with and for Haven North and then Ray Love. They were the senior career persons in the Africa Bureau. They were both very supportive of our efforts.

Q: They were the deputy assistant administrators, career people?

HOLDCROFT: That's right. The head of the Development Resources Office when I arrived in the Bureau was John Koehring, a very dedicated officer and a gentleman. I've kept in touch with John and his wife over the years. He is living now in Connecticut.

Q: This was a very large staff that you had in the Technical Resources Office.

HOLDCROFT: Yes it was. We had sixty-some professional technical staff, direct hire and contract.

Q: Did you find it difficult in the Africa Bureau to get staffing assigned to the field because of the hardship posts? Were you supported?

HOLDCROFT: It was a problem. It was very difficult to find people who were willing to go to places where there were not adequate schools for their children or had limited health care facilities. Having said that, we did have some very fine and competent people who assumed assignments to places that left a lot to be desired in terms of creature comforts.

Q: And sometimes the morale at those posts was higher than morale at other posts because of...

HOLDCROFT: It was usually a function of the leadership that was being provided by the U.S. ambassador and the head of the USAID operation.

Q: One other factor in recent years that has come into play for those assignments is meaningful work for the spouse.

HOLDCROFT: Yes, these dual career assignments have been an increasing challenge to arrange as time has gone on. I've had the opportunity since my retirement to work in a number of USAID missions in Africa and Asia and it's very curious to see the changes in attitudes with regard to spouses working in the same mission and often the same office. Certainly when you and I commenced our careers, spouses would never be assigned to jobs that in any way were clearly related. That is certainly not the case now.

Q: That's true. What do you think the biggest problems that we encountered in AID in implementing programs in Africa as opposed to your experience in Korea and the Philippines? You alluded to this to some degree with respect to Ethiopia, but I assumed that you had broader exposure to it when you had the whole Africa continent...

HOLDCROFT: The most significant difference in my experience was the paucity of trained manpower in Africa as compared with Asia. Only a few years ago, it was very difficult to communicate with many Africans because they simply had such a different world view than did our non-African colleagues who were trying to assist them in understanding some facet of development. Having said that, there were some very notable exceptions.

For example, I'm still in touch with Eduardo Tapsoba, a former Minister of Agriculture in Burkina Faso. When I first knew him when he was a graduate student at Michigan State. Or Dunston Spencer, an outstanding Sierra Leonean, trained at the University of Illinois, who has held senior government posts in that country.

Today the situation has much improved. There are now in most African countries, Sub-Saharan African countries, that critical mass of trained technical people. That critical mass that can sustain those basic institutions in agriculture, education, and health needed to move those countries forward. Of course the political environment must be favorable for them to do well.

Q: Were the foreign donors addressing this problem?

HOLDCROFT: Certainly we did. We did at least until the mid-1980s. We were very sensitive to the need for building basic institutions that would sustain development. Since the mid-1980s there has been less interest by donors in supporting institutions that would require longer term investments. There has been more interest in looking for short-term panaceas that would provide some pay-off sooner rather than later.

My sense is that over the last decade there has been decreased donor support for building those basic institutions in health, education and agriculture for sustained development, while at the same time there had been much more support for reform of the macroeconomic environment. Thus attention has been on national policy reform, structural adjustment and private sector growth.

Observations on USAID technical staff

Q: Would you care to comment as a technical person on your's as well as your contemporaries' thinking - how they felt about their role? Did they consider that they were on a cold war or geopolitical mission or that they had technical, expert knowledge to

transfer and better the life of people in the Third World which would be a credit to the U.S. in the economic development sphere.

HOLDCROFT: I think that most technical personnel in USAID, including myself, have been motivated mostly by the satisfaction gained from helping the poor and disadvantaged. This is in the American Judeo-Christian tradition of helping the poor. None-the-less, we were aware that we were involved in a cold war, especially in places like Indochina.

Another relevant question is how did the technical personnel feel about their role in the Agency, vis-a-vis the non-technical personnel. There were in the earlier part of my career more incentives for people to excel in their technical areas of expertise than experienced later on. It's clear that the incentives to pursue a career in agriculture, education, health, or engineering decreased over the 25 years that I was associated with the Agency. Having said that, in the early 1980s there was an effort on the part of Administrator Peter McPherson and Assistant Administrator for Science and Technology Nyle Brady to give more recognition to the technical personnel. The numbers of all types of technical personnel declined dramatically, commencing in the mid-1980s. Especially engineering promotions and positions both declined precipitously until the number of bona-fide engineers was minuscule. Several years ago, I was involved in doing a couple of studies of the Agency's technical personnel. But that's a whole other chapter not for discussion today.

Well, this has been great, Charles. I appreciate the opportunity to see you again and share with you and whomever the transcript of our conversation today.

End of interview